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Possible Fallibility of Polygraph Testing of Subjects in Posthypnotic States

A/B, III, 6, 17

Source is [redacted] of a prominent psychiatric clinic and research foundation. Many new methods of psychognosis and psychotherapy have been developed under source's [redacted] Source has previously submitted a report entitled [redacted]

1. Q. On the basis of your knowledge of hypnology, do you think that it would be possible to induce a posthypnotic state on a subject in such a way that his reactions to polygraph testing would be significantly altered?

A. My offhand opinion is that this would be quite possible. Of course it would be very simple to conduct experiments which could definitely decide this question one way or another, but on the assumption that such experiments have not yet been carried out, I should like to comment briefly on the possibilities to be considered.

As I understand it, the polygraph measures unconscious physical reactions to the stimuli of the mental disturbances caused by the telling of deliberate lies. Therefore, it would appear possible that a subject could possibly avoid these reactions if he were interrogated while in a posthypnotic state and thus establish his innocence for some incriminating acts or associations. This might be done by the induction of posthypnotic amnesia for the incriminating episodes and the substitution of an alibi situation by the establishment of false recollections. In order words, the subject would be convinced that he was actually telling the truth and would not have the psychosomatic disturbances necessary for a polygraph reaction. In addition to this, complete amnesia of the hypnotic itself can be effected and an effective defense can be set up against rehypnotization by another hypnotist. Furthermore, the subject's reactions to other questions used in testing the polygraphability of a subject would probably be normal.

2. (Collector's Note: In addition to the comments reported above, source suggested and supplied reference material which he felt might provide some background information on this subject. A brief review of some of this literature was undertaken by the collector and the comments listed below were abstracted. Although they often support source's opinions, they are by no means directly attributable to him, nor can the conclusions reached be construed as bearing his endorsement. A brief review of recent volumes of Psychological Abstracts (Abstracta) (later than 1950) revealed no articles describing experiments involving posthypnotic behavior in relation to the polygraph machine. Therefore the following comments include other references which the collector considers as possibly applicable to the problem.)

a. The Nature of the Posthypnotic ~~STATE~~ State — In the first place, there still seems to be a great deal of confusion about the actual nature of the posthypnotic state itself and about the scope of influence of the operator in the subject's reactions when awake. These questions were cited by Henry Cuse of Long Island University, who points out that they have plagued investigators for many years and have received no clarity in interpretation. He goes on to say that perhaps even more complex is the question as to how a subject responds to the fact that he is behaving in a way which is different from his usual behavior. (1) He explains that the "posthypnotic

act will often have in it an aspect of remembrance as to the suggestion given in the trance" but he adds, "Of course, some phenomena of a posthypnotic nature, such as hallucinatory experience, may be accepted by the subject as being of unquestionable authenticity."

b. Hypnosis and Antisocial Conduct — Despite an active controversy on the subject, there is much evidence that hypnotism can induce antisocial behavior. (2) In this connection it should be brought out that such acts can be accomplished in the posthypnotic state with no apparent knowledge or feeling on the part of the subject. Several experiments have shown that such "subjects handled peculiarities in their posthypnotic activities by accepting them as congruous aspects of their behavior. (3) Such "acceptance" of the antisocial act of lying might well preclude any physical reactions which would be measurable by the polygraph.

In experiments with the hypnotic and post-hypnotic production of antisocial behavior, attempts are often made by experimenters to break the induced state of posthypnotic amnesia several days after the experimental antisocial act or acts have been committed by the subject. The accusations brought out in these interrogations usually arouse apparently righteous indignation or disbelief on the part of the "guilty" subject. In one such experiment a young female subject had been induced under hypnosis to steal money from the pocket of a stranger's coat after awakening from her trance. (4) She was given posthypnotic amnesia for the source of the compulsion. She stole the dollar and later spent it. When confronted with the facts several days later she did not believe them. On the basis of her reactions the experimentor reported as follows: "These comments are included to indicate the difficulties a cross-examiner would meet in attempting to wring a confession from a criminal hypnotic subject. Miss A's manner betrayed not the subtlest evidence or consciousness of guilt. I cannot say, of course, what might have been her reaction to a lie-detector or third-degree methods."

Subsequently this subject was again hypnotized and her amnesia for the incident removed. "Miss A was then asked whether she thought she could in hypnosis be induced to commit more serious crimes--such as to steal important government papers were she a secretary in Washington. She said, 'Yes, I think so.' She held to this belief both in the trance and normal states.

c. Training and Testing — In case posthypnotic compulsion were utilized in an attempt to circumvent lie detection, the necessarily complete control over the posthypnotic behavior of a subject would require a period of intensive training and testing. Subjects very widely in the hypnotizability. In other words, one person might show little initial resistance to trance induction but the operator might find that he would show a great deal more resistance to illusion creation or to one or more of the standard criteria for measuring the depth of hypnosis. (Such criteria include (1) hypnotic analgesia to painful stimuli, (2) mixed olfactory hallucinations, (3) age regression control, (4) posthypnotic amnesia, (5) ability to carry out posthypnotic suggestions and the rapid induction of trance through an unrelated posthypnotic signal. (5) As Brenman pointed out, "To achieve the best results, one must utilize the individual characteristics of each subject. (6) Through patient experimentation with devious suggestions used to circumvent the points of resistance, very deep

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hypnosis can usually be obtained in a willing subject. It should then be possible to predict the effects which the subject's own peculiar personality and hypnotizability characteristics will play in the posthypnotic state. The ultimate goal of the training would be the creation of a state of hypnotizability whereby the operater could rapidly induce a posthypnotic state in which the subject would have no conscious knowledge or memory of his incriminating activities or connections.

In addition to the above goal, it would be also possible to induce in the subject a facility for autohypnosis. Leslie M. LeCron of Los Angeles stated that it is difficult to hypnotize oneself at all deeply unless a post hypnotic suggestion has been given during hetero-induced hypnosis to the effect that the person can thereafter hypnotize himself." (7)

d. Detection of Posthypnotic State by Polygraph — As far as polygraph detection of the post hypnotic state itself is concerned, this seems unlikely in the light of the negative and inconclusive results of experiments conducted by True and Stephenson which correlated electroencephalogram, pulse and planter reflexes in hypnosis with age regression and induced emotional states. (8)

(1) Guse, Henry. "Posthypnotic Behavior and Personality," Personality, Vol. 1, No. 3, Nov. 1951, page 232.

(2) Estabrooks, G.H., "The Possible Antisocial Use of Hypnotism," PERSONALITY, Vol. 1, No. 3, Nov 1951, page 294-299.

(3) Guse, op cit page 236.

(4) Brosman, Margaret, "Experiments in the Hypnotic Production of Antisocial and Self-Injurious Behavior," PSYCHIATRY, Vol 3, No. 1, Feb 42, pp 90-51.

(5) True, Robert M. and Stephenson, Charles W., "Controlled Experiments Correlating Electroencephalogram, Pulse and Planter Reflexes with Hypnotic Age Regression and Induced Emotional States," PERSONALITY, Vol 1, No 3, Nov 51, page 293.

(6) Brosman, op cit, page 52

(7) LeCron, Leslie M., "A Study of the HYPNOTIZABILITY of Hypnotists," PERSONALITY Vol 1, No 3, Nov 51, page 301.

(8) True and Stephenson, op cit pp 252-262